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The Conversion of St Paul

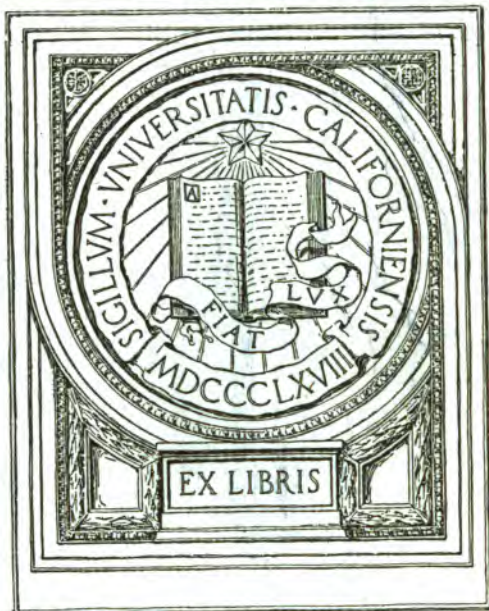
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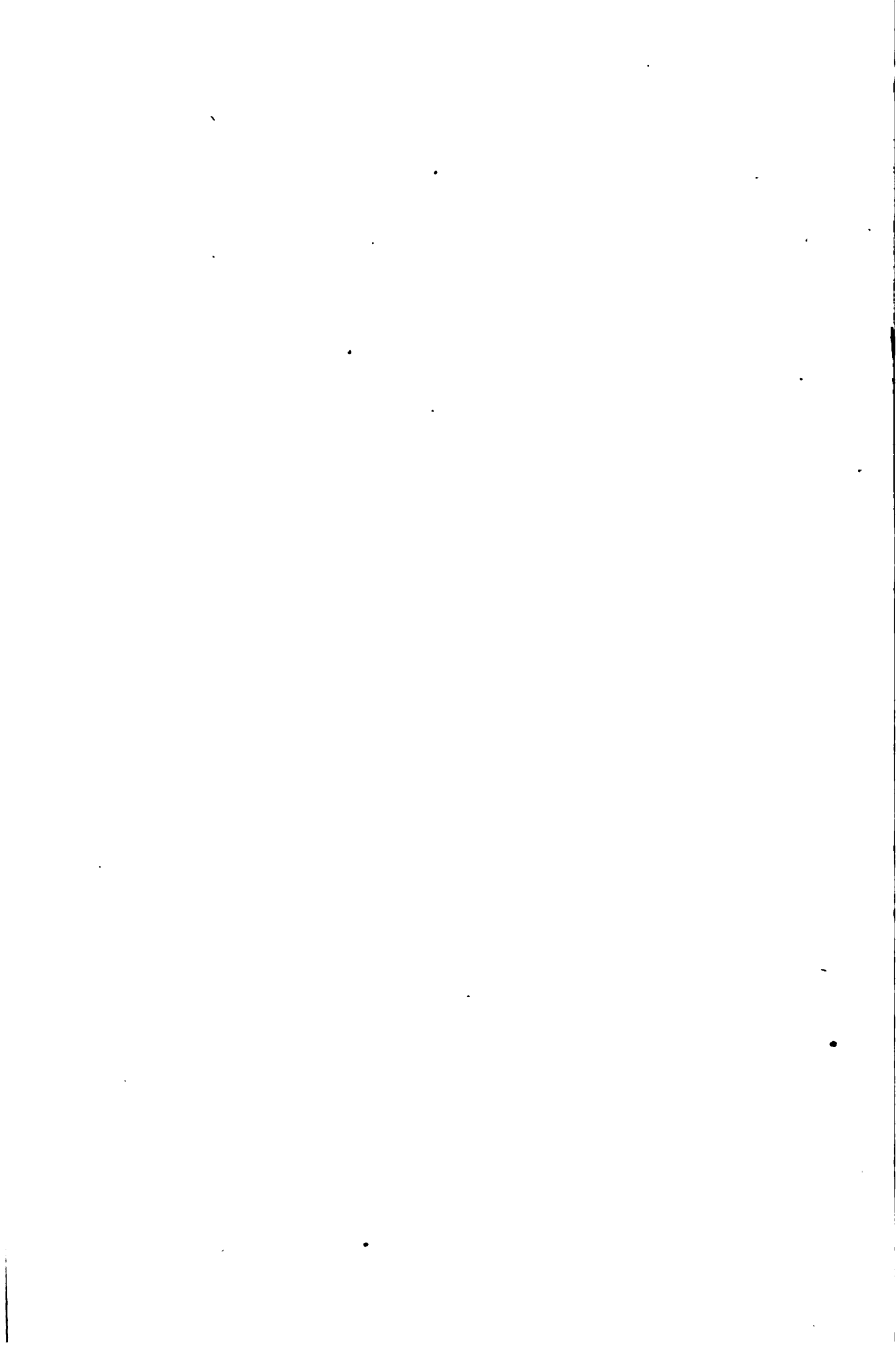








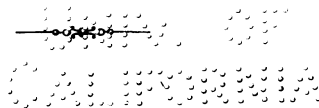
THE CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.



THE
CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.

THREE DISCOURSES

BY
GEORGE JARVIS GEER, D.D.
RECTOR OF ST. TIMOTHY'S CHURCH, NEW YORK.



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TO ONE
WHOSE UNFAILING SYMPATHY
HAS CHEERED HIM ON DURING A MINISTRY OF
FIVE-AND-TWENTY YEARS,
THIS VOLUME IS
MOST AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
BY
THE AUTHOR.

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THE
CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.

I. ITS RELATION TO UNBELIEF.

“Behold, he prayeth.”

Acts ix. 11.

It is hardly possible to dwell upon the wonderful contrast between the earlier and later periods in the life of St. Paul, their directly antagonistic character, his intense hatred of the Church, and his subsequent zeal, untiring labors and final martyrdom for the faith of Christ, and then read his own account, or that of St. Luke in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, of the cause of this change. without feeling that,

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regarded as a testimony to the truth of all that is recorded of Jesus of Nazareth, His Birth, Life, Death, Resurrection and Ascension, it is not to be escaped, it cannot be resisted. While the same individual characteristics run through both the earlier and later periods, and everywhere exhibit themselves, such as zeal, energy, perseverance, courage, ardor and boldness, there yet probably never lived a man, two sections of whose life offer a greater contrast to each other, than the two which make up the life of St. Paul. It was no idle thing that his name was changed; that he is known in the inspired volume by a different name during the different periods. "By their fruits ye shall know them." And how diverse were the fruits of his life! Look at Saul, the inflamed zealot, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, the relentless persecutor of the Church. Then

turn your eye upon Paul, the rapt Apostle, full of the Holy Ghost, bearing forth the Gospel of Christ with burning zeal among all nations and people.

Look at Saul under authority and commission from the chief-priests, seizing men and women, and all whom he "found of this way," bringing them bound to Jerusalem, and dragging them to prison and to death; then behold Paul under a commission from Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, going forth into the same cities, and into the midst of the very scenes of his persecutions, exhorting and persuading every man, night and day, with tears, to turn to the living God, to enter the ark of Christ's Church.

Look at Saul, to use his own words, compelling the disciples to blaspheme: then behold Paul, by his ceaseless labors and entreaties, bringing men to their knees

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in reverencing, honoring, and supplicating the Name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Look at Saul, "exceedingly *mad*" against the disciples, persecuting them "even unto strange cities," and then behold Paul, in the midst of that scene which occurred when he was about to depart from Ephesus, when he kneeled down and prayed with them all, and the Ephesian Christians "all wept sore and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him."

Behold him, a Jew, persecuting Christians even unto death. Then hear him a Christian, giving vent to his impassioned desire for the salvation of the Jews, willing himself to be accursed from Christ that they might be made partakers of His Great Salvation; while forty Jews, actuated by the same spirit which had actuated him, being a Jew, banded together, had bound themselves under

an oath neither to eat nor sleep till they had killed Paul.

Look at Saul at the martyrdom of St. Stephen, standing by and urging on his murderers, holding their garments, consenting unto his death, and then behold Paul, arising, as it were, out of the very grave of St. Stephen, the mightiest champion of the Faith of Christ. See him stoned at Lystra and drawn out of the city for dead, and follow him on, until he too becomes a martyr for the faith of Christ and is beheaded at Rome under the impious Nero.*

Look at Saul, successfully pursuing, and becoming enriched in his mind with all the varied learning of the heathen schools. Then hear St. Paul discoursing of the wisdom of this world as foolishness with God. Hear him preaching Christ crucified,

* Eusebius.

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to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness—hear him declaring how he counted all things but dung that he might win Christ and be found in Him. See him caught up into the third heaven, where he heard unspeakable things which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

Look at him pressing forward on his way to Damascus. As he goes thitherward, Saul is breathing out threatenings and slaughter. He arrives in Damascus. But he is another man. Bowed down, humbled to the dust in penitence and shame, he supplicates fervently for pardon. “Behold, he prayeth.” Three days pass by of prayer and fasting. He did neither eat nor drink. Three days without sight, and Saul is a baptized man. His sins are washed away. He is now calling on the Name of the Lord. He who came to kill and to destroy, stayed to preach that men

might have life, yea, that they might have it more abundantly. He who had come up to Damascus, burning with the fire of intensest hatred against the religion of a crucified deceiver, "straightway preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God."

Whence is this change? Has it been frivolously made? Has he lightly given himself to those interests which he so much hated and despised? Is he but a weak and fickle man? Is he an anomaly, of whom we may not judge by the known rules by which we estimate the character of men and explain their conduct? Read his own account or that given by St. Luke in the book of the Acts, of what occurred while he was on his way to Damascus, and you have the full explanation of this great change. The appearance to Saul as he was journeying to Damascus, of which he

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ever spoke freely, fully, and powerfully, gives, and that alone can give, the explanation of the deep and awful apprehensions of the glory and greatness and Divine Nature of Christ which possessed his whole soul. From this all through his subsequent life, his words, works, and writings came welling up in such plentiful profusion—all bearing the same impress, all consistent with this one fact and occurrence. These were not based on opinions, reasonings, or inferences drawn by his powerful mind—in which there might have been some flaw, undetected by himself, in which, however confident a convert may himself be, others could admit them or not as they might choose. They were based upon a *fact*, which was of such a nature that he could by no possibility have been deceived as to its truth and reality. He was stricken to the earth. There was a brightness above

the mid-day sun. Jesus revealed Himself to him, that He might make this most unpromising instrument "a chosen vessel unto the Lord."

Never have evidences of deep conviction of the truth of principles upon which the whole life and conduct were changed, been given which were stronger than those afforded by the life and labors of St. Paul. But when, added to this, it is remembered that they were grounded upon the certainty which he surely possessed of the event which transpired, they together tell beyond the reach of a cavil, of the mid-day appearance to him on his way to Damascus in a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun, of his risen and ascended Lord; and therein that "the Lord, He is God, the Lord He is God."

But what was it which made Saul of Tarsus meet for such an interference

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from Heaven, so wonderful and unusual, that he might be "a chosen vessel unto the Lord?" I answer, Saul of Tarsus was no trifler with what he believed to be the truth of God. Though in his zeal he was fighting, in reality, against God, yet he could say, as he did before Agrippa, "I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." And before the Jewish council, he declared, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." * And again he writes to St. Timothy, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious ; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." His conduct was sincere. Not in a common and false, but in a true sense. His ignorance

was not a wilful ignorance. While his action was most earnest as a persecutor, it did not spring from caprice, from any arbitrary determination of the will to accomplish his ends, right or wrong. There was not a doubt in his mind, and never had been, that he was doing God's service. His convictions of duty were deep and strong. The great desire which actuated him in his persecution of the Church was to serve the God of his fathers—to exterminate this alarming doctrine which threatened the subversion and extinction of that religion which he knew in ages gone had received the full sanction of Heaven. Hence, in his own significant words, "Jesus Christ our Lord counted me faithful." Neither as Saul of Tarsus nor as Paul the Apostle was he any trifler. And the entire truthfulness of his action, so far as he was concerned, and the

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truth of his convictions are distinctly manifested as such. by his unfeigned amazement at the miraculous appearance to him, by the way, of Jesus, whom he persecuted. Then he learned how Jesus was the Author and Finisher of the religion of God's chosen people, the Vindicator of its truth, the Fulfiller of its prophecies, and that the "law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ."

And when his eye had been touched by the finger of God, and he saw Christ in the law, and the law fulfilled in Him, "he mightily convinced the Jews showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ." The word of God became in his hand like "a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces." Thus while he was a chosen vessel of the Lord to bear His Name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel, and by all the ele-

ments of his nature was adapted to this work, the fact that his conviction was so clear and deep and truthful, that his conscience, in all this, had not been abused, nay, that in this very action against the Church of God, he was striving to keep his conscience void of offence, this we must regard as one of the peculiar and fitting qualifications of St. Paul which induced that divine interference by which he was elevated to the office of an Apostle. He was a man who had but to know the truth in order to labor for it. When he knew it he made everything bow to it. He knew no sacrifice too great to make in its cause. As Saul of Tarsus, it was with the whole energy of his being that he advanced the interests of the Jewish faith, putting down every obstacle which stood in its way. As Paul the Apostle, a convert to the faith of Christ, he tram-

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pled under his feet every earthly interest which conflicted with his duty. He "laid aside every weight, and pressed towards the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." "What things," says he, "were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things."

This man, whose career was so wonderful—whose life has proved a fund of exhaustless interest and instruction to the Church and to the world, who was so signally marked as a favorite of heaven—is a type of the men we most need. It is earnest men that we want in this world—not wilful men, not men who are earnest in gratifying a caprice, or their own wills, or in accomplishing their own selfish ends

—but we want men who are always in earnest respecting the truth which they do possess—who are sincere, in the sense in which St. Paul was sincere through his whole life : simply desiring to apprehend truth, and then laboring for it with the whole soul.

Such men, ever open to the influences of divine truth, may meet with some wonderful changes of opinion and action. But they are the only men who are entitled to have confidence that they will be led by the hand of God. We want earnest Christians, and we want earnest unbelievers also ; men who will always be able truly to say that they “ verily think ” that they are doing God service in the lives which they are leading.

I say we want earnest unbelievers. For if there ever was an earnest unbeliever, one who was earnest as such after the

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knowledge of Christ had been truly presented to him, one whose conscience had never been warmed and illuminated, one whose action against Christ and His holy religion, could he truly said to have proceeded, as St. Paul said that his did, from entire ignorance and pure unbelief, one who acted truly and with all his soul from existing and unadulterated convictions of duty, *that man never died an unbeliever.* Upon such a man the Spirit of God will descend. It is the kind of men who are worth having to labor for the cause of truth and for the glory of God. Rare men they are. For where is the unbelieving man, to whom Christ is preached, who can rise up in his place and declare that in his resistance he has not again and again stifled the motions of conscience, and driven back "the Light which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world,"

and which is struggling to enter his mind and his heart. If such an unbelieving man cannot be found, then to what splendid results would not earnestness lead men on! Driven not to persecute, as in the case of Saul, but to accept, the outward exertion of inward convictions would break down and demolish the external barriers of that practical unbelief which is so common, so dangerous, so utterly unworthy to call forth the special action of heaven. It is a kind of unbelief which exists in opposition to light already given, already knowingly resisted, with which our Holy Religion has to contend. I say, therefore, I would that every unbelieving man would kindle in his heart the fire of earnestness, and simply follow, not by halves, here a little and there a little, but with all his might, his real convictions respecting truth, religious truth. Strong

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as the phalanx of ungodliness and worldly lust and unbelief appears, the Church would have little to fear from persecution. Practical unbelievers would disappear like dew before the morning sun. It would rank, under the blessed influence of the Spirit of God, among the most powerful and effective means of conversion to the Church of God. The trouble is, not that men like Saul of Tarsus persecute the Church of Christ, but that *indifference to truth prevails*. Men are not longing for it, praying for it; and when they think they have found it, devoting themselves to its service with all their heart, mind, soul and strength. Indifference to truth and her interests broods like the spell of death over the minds of men. God in His providence carries home the truth of His Gospel to the heart and conscience; but there is not the remotest idea of going

on to the discharge of duty. Men draw it in with every breath they breathe. But as with the air, so with the truth. They learn its value only when God takes it from them.

Amid all the conflict of opinion, whose din and noise fill the earth, men eagerly seizing whatever makes for themselves, bolsters them up in their chosen position, thrusting from them all considerations which make against them, present the spectacle of men fighting for a victory. As if any victory will stand at the Day of Judgment, but that which Truth shall win.

Discussions are no evidence of earnest desire to get at the truth. Few of them reach a whit deeper than to give food to vanity, to drill, to acquire facility in argument, or to justify national, individual, family, sectional, or hereditary prejudices or sins. The old gladiatorial contests

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of the Grecian games have disappeared, but there has been a transmigration of their soul. Their spirit has been infused into and transfused throughout the gladiatorial games of intellectual combat, which so often serve but to perplex the mind. Truth is something, one would think, not to be hung over with solemn awe, but to be sported with, to be discoursed of and discussed for the entertainment of listeners, for the display of skill, and trick, and sleight-of-hand, to elicit admiration. Oh, how far short of what we ought to be is all this! Truth is a solemn, awful reality; an unspeakable gift, to be valued, loved, labored for, died for. To attain unto its possession is the greatest of blessings. To be ever laboring for it, from no desire of personal, temporal, selfish ends, but in its own cause, for its own sake, for humanity's sake, for the glory of God,

is the highest of duties. There is, we may be sure, more meaning in these most significant words of our blessed Lord, than we are apt to give to them: "He that doeth His will, shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God"—*i. e.*: He who discharges his duties as they rise up before him, with zeal and fidelity, without avoidance or neglect, shall be led on by the hand of God into the most intimate presence of those truths, which can be understood only by those who sincerely seek the knowledge of the will of the Lord. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." And to fear God truly, covers the whole ground. It comprehends, involves, and *leads to* all duty—all truth.

This indifference to truth suggests above all others one painful reflection. So long as it prevails there can be little hope of agreement—of unity. God will not, by

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any special act of His Providence, or by the power of His Spirit, bring men to its knowledge, until they really desire it—and for its own sake. For then only will they prize and preserve it—labor and live for it. Men who are thinking most of everything else but the truth of God, are not the men to whom He will, in any special manner, by any special act, make His truth known. Saul was ready, the moment the true light of heaven broke in upon his soul, for any service. He was not the man to ask, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” with a mental reservation to do that will or not according to his inclination or fancied interests. He would take the consequences of an answer to his prayer. He would aim to be equal to the responsibilities which it imposed. In like manner, only as any one, in full purpose of heart, turns

his steps heavenward, to follow where God shall lead, will it be a glorious announcement when, as of Saul, it shall be said of him, "BEHOLD HE PRAYETH!"

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CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.

II. ITS FALSE USES AND TRUE.

“Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.”
1 Timothy i. 16.

IN these words, St. Paul gives us one of the chief reasons of his conversion—not by any means the only one, but a leading reason. It is after the manner of the Spirit in God’s Word to present one point of a whole, as involving the rest, or as corroborating such as have gone before. As when after a miracle of our blessed Lord we are told that “then His disciples believed on Him;” meaning that thereby they were built up and strengthened in

their belief. When Elijah restored the dead son of the widow of Zarephath to her arms, alive again, although having already full knowledge and belief that he was a prophet sent from God, she now expresses the confirmation which her faith received, in these terms: "Now, by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth." So one point of the Christian system is at one time presented as in itself sufficient for salvation, and then another in like manner, and this because, as we must suppose, one always involves the rest. Thus this reason, given by St. Paul for his conversion, does not exclude the others, elsewhere stated. As where Christ tells him by the way, "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen

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and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee." Then, again, St. Paul himself elsewhere states the cause of this merciful interference to have been his earnest endeavor to do God service, and his real conviction that in persecuting the Church he was pleasing God. Here then were other causes given ; one of which is stated at one time and another at another.

An interesting question, turning for the most part on this difference, involving various considerations growing out of it, arises. How far does such a divine interference in the case of Saul, afford any encouragement to that large class of men, as yet wandering from Christ's fold, who are untrue to the obligations and duties of the Christian faith ?

How far can the suddenness, the overwhelming character and other circumstances of this conversion be made appli-

cable to cases of this kind? What have we a right to expect, at the present time, or in the days of the ordinary action of the Church, as based upon this conversion?

Let us be governed by the facts as they have been given to us by the Holy One Himself. And may the Blessed Spirit aid us in arriving at and elucidating the simple truth of His own Word and work.

The abuse of *blessings*! This is one of those oft-spoken sentences which comprehends a great variety of sins in detail. It is one of those general terms in which we sum up man's guilt, because so many of the lesser divisions and species of sins are ranged under it. This present subject brings before us, *the false uses which are made of the conversion of St. Paul.*

The first (and in one relation the least mischievous) of these is the doctrine of *the*

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irresistibility of grace, attempted to be drawn from this transaction.

Now I do not undertake to say, that, when a Christian holds this doctrine, he holds a doctrine which will affect him or his religious life unfavorably. We can easily understand how a reverent mind may incline to such a belief. Because it is the grace of *God*, he reasons that it must be irresistible, it must accomplish its intended purpose.

But there seem to be insuperable difficulties in the way, in all those passages of Holy Scripture which represent the Spirit of God as striving with men, which bid us "Quench not the Spirit," on the very ground that we have the dangerous power and ability to do so, and which represent the unfaithful as receiving the grace of God "in vain." And surely we can find no warrant for the

doctrine in the conversion of St. Paul. It is true it would have been a greater miracle, we may almost say, than the divine transaction itself, if Saul had not been converted. And that, because of the whole character and circumstances of the appearance. In this sense we cannot but say that it was irresistible—but by no means in a sense which would deprive Saul of his free-agency. The power of choice was still his, however great the madness of resisting would have been. Not one word to the contrary is recorded, or which supposes the opposite. He did choose; immediately. Of his own free will, he asked, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” His own account of the transaction is only reconcilable with such a consciousness on his part. He says to King Agrippa: “Whereupon I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” Here

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was freedom of action—here was choice between obedience and disobedience. He represents himself as free to act. He makes it a point to be presented in his defence, that since the vision was a heavenly vision, and he would follow the truth, he would not be disobedient, as would not any other right-minded man. These, I say, are difficulties in the way of receiving such a doctrine.

Yet, however little a belief in the doctrine might do harm to one already a Christian, I can hardly conceive of anything within the pale of possible belief which an *irreligious* man might hold which could be more injurious to him. He proposes to wait for the irresistible operation of the Spirit upon him. He shuns all the established means of grace. He irreverently treats the ordinary and sufficient motions of the Holy Ghost, constantly

iterated and reiterated in his heart and conscience, as what proceeds from his own nature, which he may heed or not as he chooses. The years of his life roll away, and he goes down to his grave an unregenerated and unrenewed man. The motions of the Holy Spirit have never been so strong that he could not resist them, if he chose. Thus the doctrine, besides being unwarranted in Scripture, puts the souls of unbelieving men in imminent peril.

This brings me directly to the main point we have in hand—the *chief* of the false uses made of this transaction. This record, it is greatly to be feared, is wrested to the destruction of those who thereby encourage themselves in the sin of presumption. Presumption, not in hoping for mercy when guilt is dark and ruin is impending, not in turning back unto God

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and suing for pardon under any circumstances of error, crime or delusion. For it is by this live coal from the altar of His truth that God would light the fires of hope even in the breast of the condemned criminal, sorrowing, penitent and broken-hearted. "*For this cause I obtained mercy,*" St. Paul says, "that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting." This is indeed one of the true, practical uses to be made of the conversion of St. Paul. It gives ground of hope and encouragement to sinful, wandering men to seek forgiveness and acceptance with God. The fact that Jesus Christ showed so much long-suffering and mercy in this instance, is distinctly presented as an evidence of God's willingness to pardon all grievous offend-

ers. The very extremity of the case of Saul enters into the essence of this aspect of the event. For it is scarcely possible to conceive of a more flagrant dishonor done to God than that a man, having the power to do so, should, by torture, or otherwise, compel men to utter blasphemies against God their Saviour, loved and revered with all their heart, mind, soul and strength, and whose souls were filled with a sense of His awful majesty. Yet Saul had done this. Nay, while he pursued the disciples under various forms of persecution, by torture and imprisonment, we know that he did not stop short even of consenting unto and procuring their death. The conversion of St. Paul was designed, therefore, to speak forth most eloquently, as it surely does, the long-suffering of God. It is set forth as a pattern for all those who ever after would approach Him and believe on

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His name. And how great an encouragement it ought to be to those who are "in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity!" It is a living, alway-pleading embodiment from the very hand of the Great Sculptor Himself, of those words which He spake by the mouth of His Prophet Ezekiel: "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness which he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive." It is "a pattern" which poor human nature needed. Men on their way down the dark road which leads to the chambers of death, sometimes, when it is not too late to turn and repent, become the victims of despair; so great is their guilt, so numerous are their sins. The effect of an awakened and smiting conscience is often to fill such men with gloom and the spirit of desperation. Such men, although they have abused

their most precious privileges, and even sinned against light and knowledge, are to look upon this scene upon which we are dwelling. Let them behold Saul while on his way to Damascus, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the Church, suddenly arrested and thrown to the earth, that he might see, and know, and believe, and be forgiven. It is a scene which presents in glorious colors to such eyes the long-suffering of God. A scene by which He would snatch them from a melancholy and fatal gloom. A pattern it is by which, as by a light from His holy word, he would light in their souls the lamp of hope, that the bliss of His favor, of His forgiveness, of Heaven, may yet be theirs. Holy, blessed, and legitimate use is this to make of this conversion! Far be it from me to say aught which should dim its lustre, take from its brightness, or diminish

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its force and availability for this great purpose, for which, we are told, it was recorded. It tells sinful men that "though their sins be as scarlet," God, through Christ, is ready to make them as "white as snow;" though they be "red like crimson," He is willing to make them "as wool." Thus to hope, and learn, and believe, and henceforth go on to repentance, and so up to the gates of salvation, *this* is not pre-sumption.

The presumption of which I speak is this: that any man shall *wait* to be made the object of a special, powerful, irresistible or overwhelming interference from heaven. Never will be revealed, till the Day of Judgment, the extent of the evil which has been wrought by this spirit of presumption, which has, in some way, been infused into the hearts of multitudes of men. Its pernicious effects are seen in the inactivity of such men in all those matters

which have respect to their spiritual duties and obligations, and God's revealed provisions for the gift of His grace.

All pastoral experience will testify to the fact that this evil is wide-spread. It is constantly pleaded in extenuation of neglect, "I have not been overwhelmed, I have received no instantaneous, sensible shock ; nothing has occurred within my experience which I cannot describe." Such replies, when the most important of all duties are pressed home to individuals, are common ; given as an excuse for a little more sleep, for procrastination, and for a continued trampling upon the requirements of God. Such men are in a very different frame of mind from that of Saul when he set out to go from Jerusalem to Damascus. Over and above the fact that Saul was always in earnest to know God's will, that he might do

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it—which, it is greatly to be feared, is not the spirit of these men—there is a point of difference of the greatest magnitude between the case of Saul and their own. These have already been made to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. They will not hesitate to say that they hold the fact. Saul did not believe this when he set out to go to Damascus. The point of resemblance between the two cases begins farther along on the road, after Saul had fallen to the earth, and in answer to his question, “Who art Thou, Lord?” the reply had been given, “I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.”

Just here they occupy one and the same point. Here the resemblance holds. Saul now acknowledges the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is his God and Saviour, which is all that is yet accomplished. Here they

hold the same truth ; but they have been convinced in different ways. Saul has been convinced by the sudden and visible appearance of Christ to him by the way. These by the knowledge which has been brought to their doors from their childhood. To them, Jesus of Nazareth has been ever "passing by" and calling them, and the fact of His Messiahship has been owned. Here, I repeat, they are at the same point of knowledge and conviction, and Saul, like them, is still without the special gift of the Holy Ghost. With both, there is conviction, there is knowledge. But it is only for this point that the resemblance holds. The moment we pass this, the widest separation takes place, through their fault. Saul, overcome by the momentous nature of the fact of Christ's Messiahship, asks, at once, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And,

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being thus directed, bowed down with a sense of the awful responsibility which the knowledge of such a fact imposed upon him, he goes as he is led along by the hand towards the city of Damascus, to submit to the putting on of the hands of Ananias, and the washing of the waters of Baptism.

But how stands the case with these men? Occupying the same point of conviction, possessing a knowledge they will not deny, to convey which nothing miraculous has been necessary, because the same thing has been accomplished without this, these men lift up no voice, as the result of this conviction. They do not cry out with Saul, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" they are cold, undisturbed men, who will not permit themselves to realize any responsibility growing out of the fact that Heaven has already in its own way made them believe all that Saul knew when he hum-

bly and earnestly addressed this question to Christ.

Here is the fatal neglect, the grievous wrong, the heinous sin. And when, without their asking, God sends them the knowledge of His will, in a voice which peals upon their ears from the thousand tongues of the Divine Word, the manifold providences of God, their own consciences, and His living ministry, these men even then go their way, not to those means of grace represented in the person and ministry of Ananias and the Baptism to which he called Saul, but rising up with Saul, they go from him, one to his farm and another to his merchandise, and "they all with one consent begin to make excuse."

These are the men who will live on in their present condition, and profess to be waiting to be flattered by a special visitation and interference on the part of Heaven.

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Waiting to be overwhelmed? For what? Surely, not to accomplish that which God has already accomplished in them in another way, but which the sudden appearance effected in Saul. Waiting to be overwhelmed? Surely, not to work conviction in them of a fact which they already believe, a fact denied by Saul before his instantaneous shock? Waiting to be suddenly overwhelmed? For sanctification, perchance? Why?—because Saul was overwhelmed to be converted? The two things were distinct in his case. The gift of the Holy Ghost was subsequently made to him in the ordinary way. Why should God's way of dealing with these so far outdazzle that of his treatment of St. Paul that these shall be made the object of a sudden visitation of His power, for a purpose which He would accomplish in Saul only in the ordinary and established way?

Alas, that expectations so prejudicial to the progress of God's work of salvation should have become so wrought into the common mind! Alas that the always open way of repentance and faith, in which the blessed Spirit of God is ever ready to render powerful aid, should be so blocked up! The propagators of the error can scarce ever know the extent of the evil which it has wrought in keeping back, it may often be, men anxious to do God's will.

But we are told there are many in our Christian communities, who *deny* the Christian faith, and in this respect do now resemble Saul before his conversion.

There is another important respect, however, in which they do not resemble him. Saul was not, like so many in the world, clinging to a mere denial of the Christian faith, and founding his action on no system

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of Divine Truth. He was with all zeal clinging to the time-honored and hitherto divinely sanctioned system of the Jewish Church. He was not living in the miserable, unsatisfactory condition of bare denial and contradiction. He doubted none of the evidences of the divine origin of the Jewish faith. He would have sealed this conviction with his blood at any moment. But have these men any such excuse? To what supposed, divinely sanctioned system are they clinging with honest but mistaken zeal? To what form of religion which they believe to be holier and more ancient, are they deeming Christian obedience prejudicial? and in defending which they are jealous for the honor of God? I answer, none. This class of men present nothing in the place of that which they do not receive. To borrow another's figure, used with far less justice; "their action may be

compared to a statue of Janus, with the one face, which we must suppose pointing to Christianity, entire, fresh, as from a master's hand; beaming with life and force and witty scorn on the lip: the other, looking toward the 'something to be put in its place,' maimed, featureless, and weather-beaten, into an almost visionary confusion and indistinctness."—*Coleridge*.

Now, to bring this point to a conclusion, is it safe, or wise, or scriptural, for men to *wait* for some sudden and irresistible outpouring of God's Spirit to effect their conversion? Will such men ever submit themselves to God's will? As a matter of experience, do they? Are they not seeking for signs and wonders? And is it not to them that the word has gone forth, "There shall no sign be given unto you but the sign of the prophet Jonas?" St. Paul was an exception in that mode of

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producing conviction which took place with all the rest of the College of Apostles. Are these to be favorites of Heaven in such a transaction above Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, and Thomas?

The whole world was lying in sin. The Gospel was preached unto men—its doctrines, its basis, its hopes—and men were persuaded to become Christians. Such as were converted to the Faith were baptized for the remission of sins, and then, with the laying on of hands, received the gift of the Holy Ghost.

What hope is there that these shall follow the exception and not the rule? Nay, millions were then, at that very time, going down to their graves in sin, to whom Christ never appeared as He did unto Saul. Wherein, I ask, is the present generation of sinful men different from them, save that those who now go on in a

life of practical unbelief, sin against greater light and knowledge, and therefore deserve greater condemnation at God's hand? God's words to all such men are, The time is always present. "*Now* is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." "What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?" "They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them."

All pastoral experience goes to corroborate the views which have now been presented. The various offices of God's appointment ever have been, and to the end of this world, are to be discharged with more or less success. The Church has ever found it so. So was it even with the Apostles. That which takes fast hold upon one mind or one community, is resisted by another, by a power of choice which makes every man fearfully responsible. One

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after another men's minds become impressed by the truth, at longer or shorter intervals. Sometimes there are many, sometimes there are few, and again, it may be, none at all. Still the hammer of the Word of God must fall continually. And thus are men gathered into the fold of Christ. The person who, when all is quiet around, comes to God's minister, seeks instruction and guidance, and goes on by prayer and penitence in faith to seek pardon and acceptance, and thus is brought into the ark of Christ's Church, or ratifies in Confirmation the vows of Baptism, is a true type of those of whom the sterling and reliable body of worshippers and communicants is composed. These are they from whom, we believe, God will at the last day make up His jewels. Be it understood, therefore, that the ordinary means, used as united with repentance,

faith and obedience, are all that any man can find warrant for expecting, waiting for, or depending upon. These are ever ready. Christ is ever in them, and they in Him. "Come, for all things are *now* ready."

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III. ITS RELATION TO THE CHURCH.

“And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.” *Acts ix. 6.*

CHRIST, who had now ascended up where He was before, thought good to stop the mad course of the most relentless persecutor of His Church, and to make him, in that Church, a burning and a shining light.

His position, as the great Apostle of the Gentiles, invests all that pertains to his wonderful conversion with peculiar interest. The Epistles which he wrote are fourteen in number. Through these he

continues to fulfil his great office to all people ; for in them, he, being dead, yet speaketh. There probably is never an instant of time in which these epistles are not conveying the knowledge of divine truth to multitudes of minds.

The conversion of St. Paul was sudden and miraculous, and unlike, as far as we know, to God's dealings with any of the other apostles.

In his own account of this event, he says, "As I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief-priests, at midday, I saw in the way a light above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them that journeyed with me." A physical effect was produced upon him, and also upon them that journeyed with him. All fell to the earth, and he was struck with blindness. Then he heard a voice saying unto

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him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" And he said, "Who art thou, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

Every account simply states these facts. That Jesus is the Christ, becomes known to him by this special revelation. To convince him of this fact, and in and with that conviction to fill his mind with awful apprehensions of the divine greatness and glory of Christ, was the starting point. Then, Saul, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

Up to this point the action has been altogether miraculous. Shall it continue to be so? This is a question which touches a vital point in our practical Christianity. He who is thus addressed by the prostrate Saul, while on earth responded to such appeals by some personal

action. He did not say, go to Peter, or John, or James. But being present on earth, and in the midst of His personal ministry, He personally acted. He is now the risen and ascended Lord. The soul of a stricken sinner looks unto Him, asks guidance, submits himself to His hands to be dealt with as He shall please.

If He has thought fit to interfere, out of the usual order, for one purpose, why not for another? Shall His response indicate invisible action between the Saviour and the sinner directly? Shall He pour contempt upon the outward action of a visible body? Or, having left it to do His work upon earth, having commissioned it, having breathed upon it, having promised His presence and the ratification of its work, having said, "He that heareth you heareth Me, and he that despiseth you despiseth Me," shall He, having arrested

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Saul and made him cry out to Him, then remand even this special case to the visible Church? Will He by a present personal act do all, in this case, where, for most pressing reasons, He has, unlike His action in all other cases, now done a part? The question of Saul is: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Note well the Saviour's answer: "And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." Nothing has here been said to Saul of the forgiveness of sins, by Him, from whom alone all forgiveness can proceed; and who is here at hand, addressed by Saul, to do this work, if it is to be done independently of the Church on earth. No action of the Blessed Spirit is recorded as transpiring, here and now. Saul is simply paralyzed by the knowledge of the hitherto denied fact of the Messiah-

ship of Christ, and by the physical effect upon him of the miraculous appearance. He is amazed and confounded, subdued and crushed. This is what, according to the record, it was designed that the appearance by the way should accomplish for this part of the work. For everything beyond this, beyond what was essential to his conviction that Jesus is the Christ, except his personal mission to become a witness for Christ to the Gentiles, he is directed to go into the city.—“Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” “Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.”—It is not until he arrives there, and has been three days without sight and without food, that the Holy Ghost is given to him. How? *Through the laying on* of the hands of Ananias. “And Ananias, putting his hands on him, said, Brother Saul, the Lord

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(even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest), hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales ; and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized."

"Hath sent *me*"—Here was a living, visible person, appointed to represent the invisible Christ, *i. e.*, Christ here reiterates that which He so often taught while upon earth, that is the identification of His Name and authority with the office and work of His visible Church. This is a point which St. Paul must have fully understood, when he said that the ambassadors for Christ spake and acted in the "stead" of Christ. And everywhere, both in times inspired and in those uninspired, which immediately followed, the visible

Church, through its ministry, spake and acted for Christ.

It is important to scrutinize this remarkable incident in the history of our holy religion more closely, because it is so confidently relied upon for inculcating the validity of spiritual action, independently of an organized, existing, historical body, known as the Church of Christ; and also because it meets so specifically the common and popular cry of no intervention between the soul of the sinner and the Saviour—and that, under the pretext of rendering peculiar honor to the Saviour.

Look then at the scene before us, as it bears upon these points. Here is a man, with nothing between him and his Saviour. He is asking of that Saviour, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” What answer is made? What is done in response to this, by Him who hears and answers

prayer? What does He, who has all power both in Heaven and in earth, do? What does He do who is the Author of our Holy Religion? Does He act? Does He now say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee?" Does He dispense with His own ordinance? Does He excuse him from obedience—from baptism and the laying on of hands? By no means. He puts the intervention between the sinner and Himself the Saviour, by express direction. He places Saul in communication with the dispensation which He himself has inaugurated, at the point at which he belongs, looking forward, of course, to the time when no intervention will be needed. He teaches this: that *present duty is conformity to the present dispensation*, appointed for an ever ripening work—appointed to reach results as from cause to effect.

"Arise," He says, "and go into the city,

and there it shall be told thee what thou must do." Ananias, by His direction, became the living, visible channel of farther communication with the body and soul of Saul. No longer is the finger of Christ literally to be laid upon the sinner, as once Christ took up little children in His arms, laid His hands upon them and blessed them. Ananias, as the type and forerunner of all Christ's ministering servants ever after upon earth, appointed by Christ for this purpose, visibly to act in His stead, touches his eyes that they may receive sight, puts his hands on him that he may be filled with the Holy Ghost, and bids him "arise and be baptized, and wash away" his "sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Christ says nothing to him of baptism. But while on earth He had sent forth His disciples to baptize every creature. And now it is to one of these, thus

commissioned, that He sends Saul. All that Ananias does and says to Saul is said and done in the name and by the authority of Christ.

Perish forever before this act of Christ Himself every aspersion of man against the Holy Offices and Ministrations of the visible Church of Christ here upon earth ! In and through Ananias Christ touched and healed him. Christ, the only Source of grace : Ananias, the visible channel of that grace. The waters of Baptism, the clay upon the eyes : Christ the power which says, *Be opened!*

Look at it again ! scan it closely ! When Saul had been convinced of the one great fact, and by the personal action of Christ, as in the case of the other apostles, his place was assigned him as one of them, although the Saviour, but for laws of action established by Himself, might have

gone on, and directly said and done all that He had appointed His Church to do ; although this oft-pictured scene or idea of the individual standing face to face with the Saviour, was here a reality, and there was nothing between them, yet Christ does not take back to Himself, even in this one instance, and for a special purpose, that which He had commissioned His visible Church to do in His Name. Saul recovers his sight through the *touch of Ananias*. He receives the Holy Ghost through the laying on of the hands of Ananias. And in so many explicit words, " baptism " is set forth as the instrument of remission.

This incident derives its great value, partly from the fact that it is the only recorded instance in the New Testament of Christ's meeting a sinner, repenting of his sins, after his Ascension. It is precious to us, because in the ever widening work

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of the Church, the reconciliation of sinners to God through Christ must be repeated at every point. Each one, convinced of the claim which Christ has upon him, must, after the example set by Christ Himself, be directed to the living ministry for baptism and for guidance. For the Church of Christ, in its holy and divinely ordained offices, was appointed to come between the soul and God. That this is so, is the special provision of Christ in this present dispensation. The patriarchal and the Jewish dispensations each had their peculiar, and as it has proved, passing offices assigned to them. Before us and beyond the present, God has in reserve the vastly higher blessings of immediate communion with Him, the glorious fruition of His presence. These present appointments may be the childish things, to be looked back upon as such, which shall be

put away from our full manhood. As, after the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, an apostle, inspired to do so, could turn upon the once needful appointments of the past and call them "weak and beggarly elements;" so may we, if permitted to enter the heavenly state, there look back upon the appointments of the present dispensation, and recognize their incomparable inferiority to those in the midst of which we shall be dwelling.

Yet, not obedient here and now, to that which is appointed for us here and now, we shall never be permitted to enter there. We are Christians here, under training—under training according as God hath appointed that we shall be trained. In Heaven there will be no sun. "The Lamb is the Light thereof." As well might we undertake to dispense with the ordinance.

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of the sun by day and the moon by night now, for that reason, as to dispense now with the temple of God and all that has been divinely appointed therein ; or because there is no temple there, since "the Lord God Almighty is the Temple of it," refuse to build temples wherein to worship God, here upon earth.

The Church of Christ on earth was ordained, in its living ministry and holy offices, to come between the soul and God. For this end was it created. Christ purchased it with His own most precious blood. Intervene! Not to hinder and obstruct, but to *receive* and *give* freely ; to give that which freely it has received. Hence it is written, "The Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved." Christ is the Fountain, the Church is the channel. But for this intervention, the Fountain would be sealed to us.

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When we reflect that this objection to any intervention between the soul and God is carried so far as to be made to apply to the mediation of Christ Himself, in His own person, and to cause His rejection, surely we ought to look upon the spirit itself with something more than suspicion. The soul which longs after God, and realizes its own sinfulness, knows that there must be a process of preparation through which it must pass before it can be made meet for the presence of God. It must be kept standing in the vestibule awhile before it can enter the temple itself. It must "by baptism put on Christ," before it can be accepted by the Father. The children of Israel, when in the midst of all those visible manifestations of His presence, the thunderings and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, "said unto Moses, Speak thou

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with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die." God, by working in and for us through means, has responded to this craving of man's nature. His immediate presence, in the case before us, made palpable, although veiled in the mountain, it was not in man to be able to endure. It is in express reference to this scene that St. Paul speaks of the great blessing of the gift of the Church: "Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more. And so terrible was the sight that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake. But ye are come unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem."

When Saul was converted in the extraordinary manner narrated, the brightness of the divine presence was above that of the midday sun. Saul was blinded, and all who were with him fell to the earth.

Read the record of the Transfiguration. Hear God saying, "There shall no man see me and live." Remember how, when the shechinah, or divine glory, filled the tabernacle, Moses was not able to enter into it—could not look upon it without danger to his life. Remember how it is written of the Temple of Solomon, that after it was built and consecrated, "the glory of the Lord filled the house, and the priests could not enter into the house, because the glory of the Lord filled the house." As well might we insist that electricity shall have no conductor, as to insist that there shall be no visible Church. As well might we say, no atmosphere shall

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come between us and the sun ; that its rays must fall directly upon us. Could we have our way in nature, in this same spirit, instead of falling to warm and to nourish, and to cause the earth to bring forth abundantly, the rays of the physical sun would fall to wither and to blight, to kill and to destroy. All things would perish from off the face of the earth, through the very agency appointed to give life and to sustain it. God's way is, through the intervention of the atmosphere, so to refract and convey the rays of the sun that they shall reach us for purposes most beneficent. And so, but for the intervention of the visible Church, the out-dazzling rays of the Sun of Righteousness would fall not to heal and save, but to destroy us.

God is spoken of in two ways in the Holy Scriptures, and these depend upon .

the relation which we sustain to Him. In one "Our God is a consuming fire." In the other He is the "Light of Life," "The way of salvation," our "Refuge," and "our Saviour." If we cast aside the provisions of grace within the system of grace, the appointed interventions, "Our God is a consuming fire." Christ is the "Sun of Righteousness." He would send down the saving rays of His light upon us. But He follows His own analogies, laid in nature, in the creation of the world. These illustrate His wisdom in the world of grace. He would send down His own effulgence upon us, not to wither and destroy, but through His own appointed medium, and that is His visible Church. As in the natural world, without this intervention; brought near to us, either we could not communicate with God at all, as receiving the bright beams of His Divine

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Nature, or if we did we should perish. Christ's visible Church, like His human Body, makes His presence as God upon earth possible. It is given as a shield to protect us while we are brought into His awful presence, and near to His sacred person. Nay, under this present dispensation, so far advanced beyond all that has gone before, both the Father and the Son enter into us and make their abode with us. We now commune with Him to the saving of the soul. We become temples of the Holy Ghost, to the healthful and happy sanctification of the whole man. The Incarnation is perpetuated. Mercy is inscribed upon the very portals of this house of the Lord, which men call an intervention. "Her walls are salvation and her gates praise." "The Church is His Body—the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." It is that kingdom of God to

discourse respecting which to His disciples our blessed Lord remained forty days upon earth after His resurrection.

Men may talk boastfully of personal independence, but it comes to be but a poor thing when it is an independence of the holy mission and offices which are God's own merciful provisions for man's redemption, sanctification and final salvation.

Let no one be betrayed by this cunningly devised artifice which is invested with so much power, because of its insidious flattery of our corrupt nature. This is an old enemy from which the race has already fearfully suffered. The angels were once ambitious to be independent of God ; and for their reward were cast down to the bottomless pit, "reserved under chains and darkness unto the Judgment of the Great Day." That old serpent, the devil, one of

these fallen angels, instilled the same spirit into the first pair, saying, "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." The struggle with men now is to bring them to comply with the terms of *this present dispensation*. The "carnal mind" is still "enmity against God." It seeks isolation, independence. It ever tends to individualism. In Christ we are "members one of another." The Church is His Fold, His City, His Holy Mountain, His Ark, His Kingdom, His Body, in which we are bound together "by joints and bands" and united with the Head, from whom nourishment is ministered to every part, so that the whole Body "increaseth with the increase of God." Christ said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" because he "persecuted the *Church*." Not to recognize the interests of Christ and His

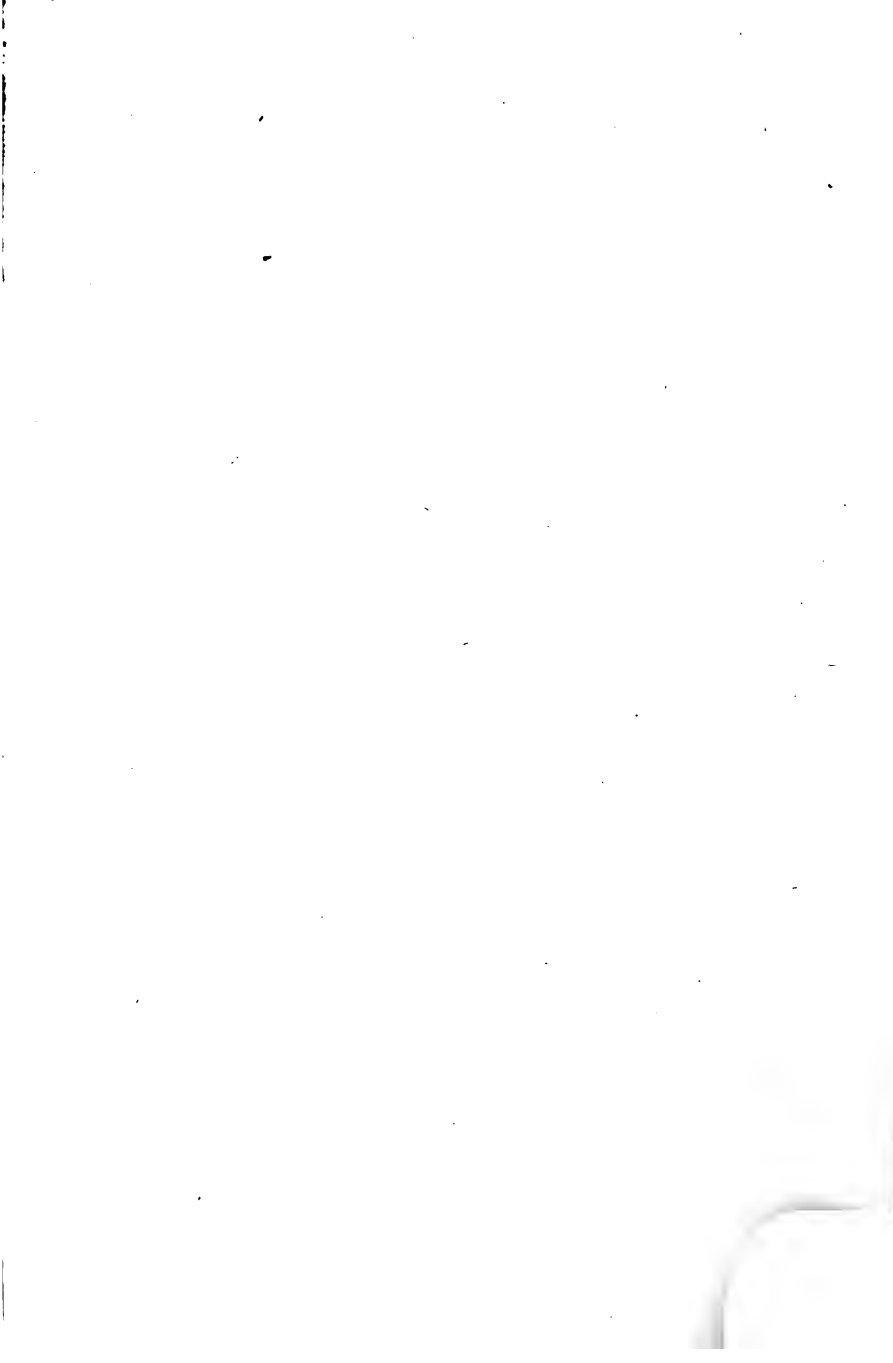
Church as inseparable, to strike at one, as if to honor the other, to rend asunder the Body from the Head, to neglect the offices, institutions and appointments of the Church, is to abandon the whole Christian idea—is to accept the infidel idea—to take infidel ground. One who does this should not call himself a Christian because he happens to have been born in a Christian land.

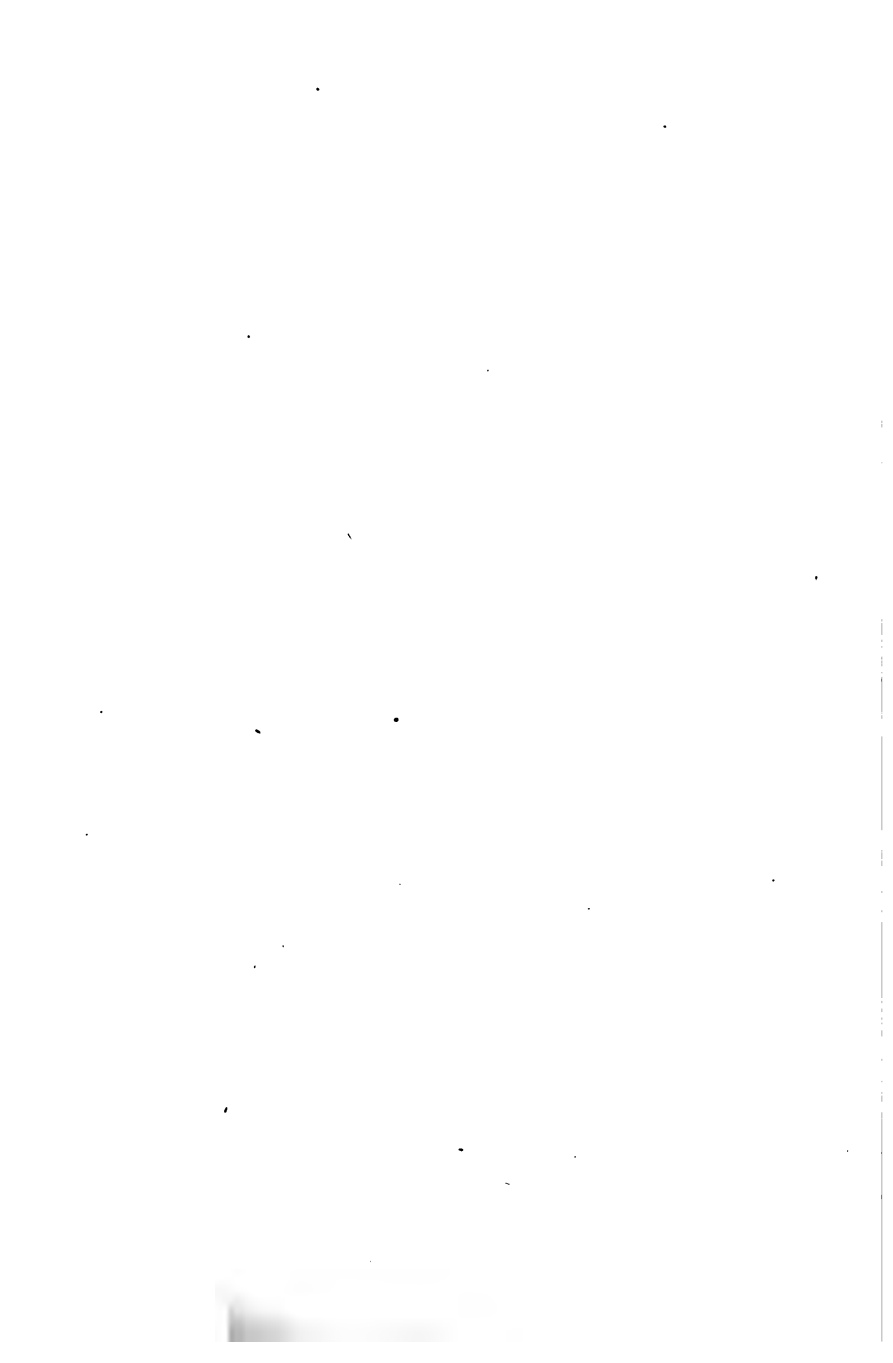
Let us be armed as God arms us in His Holy Word against those attacks upon the visible existence and office of the Church of Christ, to which we are exposed in so much that is written, printed and declaimed. Let these plain principles of the Divine economy be to us as the sword of the Spirit, ever at hand, to be used, at least, in the protection of our own hearts and minds against their pernicious effects.

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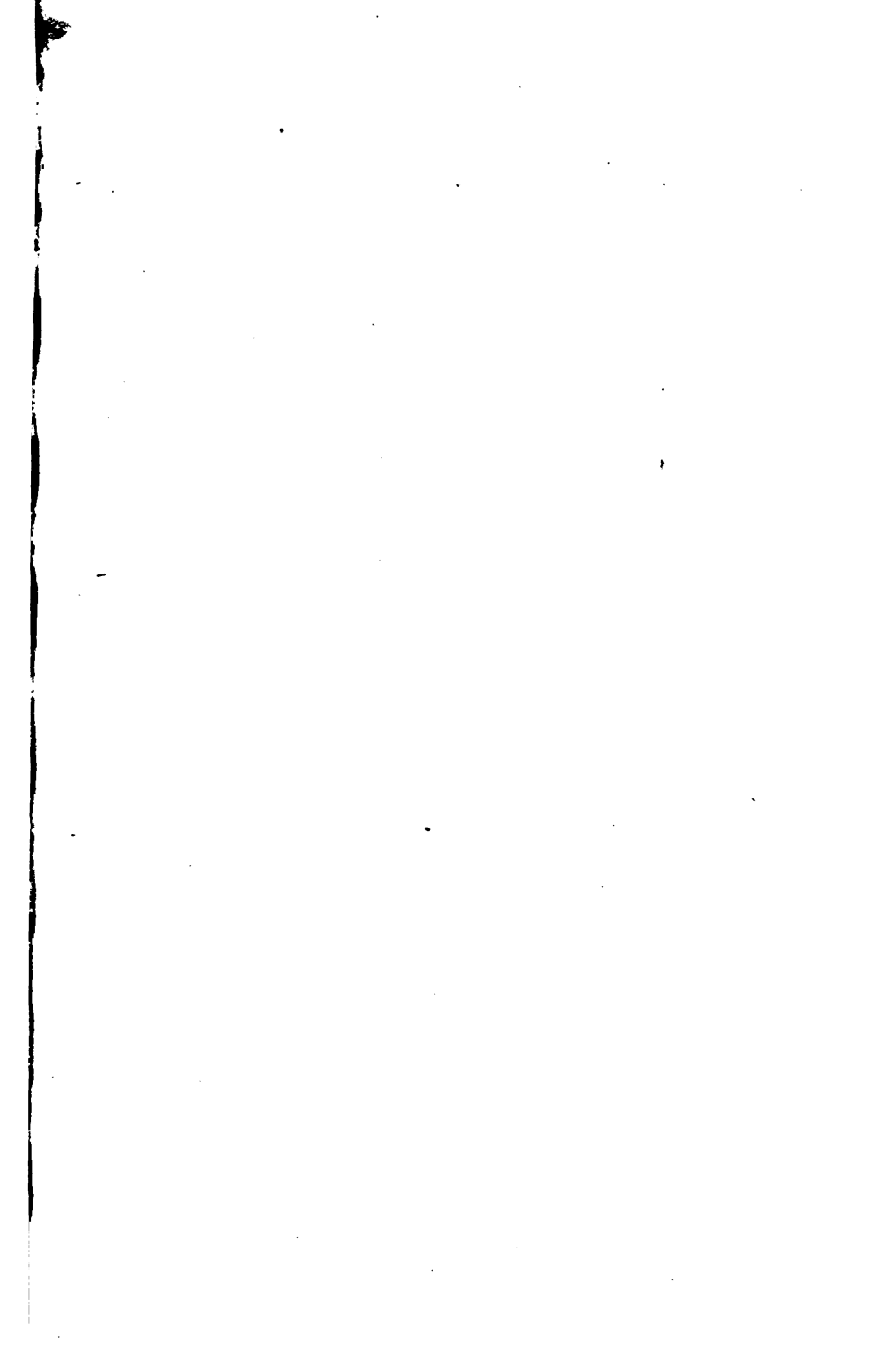
And let us not, while professing the Christian Faith, prove recreant to its essential principles, or attempt to be wise above the wisdom of the Author and Finisher of our Faith.

THE END









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